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EDITORIAL NOTES

The present controversy in Chicago between the Board of Education and a portion of the teaching force, represented largely by the Teachers' Federation, marks an interesting epoch in the evolution of the common-school system. While the discussion just now is confined to this city, the questions involved are of more than local interest. There are certain definite principles at stake which must be clearly defined everywhere before the schools can be safely considered the cradle of a true democracy.

The immediate cause of the irritation at this time is the attempt being made by the board to secure some charter provisions and certain legislation bearing upon finance, the position of the superintendent, the election or appointment of members of the board, the promotion of teachers, and perhaps other matters of less importance. Aside from the right or wrong of the propositions themselves, the most interesting aspect of the situation is in the singular fact that a large body of teachers dares to take a decided stand against such legislation proposed by the board as they, the teachers, consider inimical to their best interests. The spectacle is unique in our educational history. The Board of Education, superintendents, principals, and all others clothed with authority have had things their own way so long that it is not surprising that they should be amazed, and at last enraged, at the cool presumption of the teachers. On the other hand, the teachers have been for so long a time non-resistant, and inert as a public influence, it is but little wonder that they show some signs of recklessness with their new-found strength.

The fact is being developed with great clearness that the much-boasted freedom of the teacher has been but little more than

an empty phrase. The more one reflects upon it, the less well can he understand why it ever should have been applied to a teacher at all, so completely has the whole educational situation been dominated by officials whose real and natural functions are administrative only. It is but very recently that the teacher's tether has reached beyond the space around her desk. The course of study has been manufactured by those who have had the least intimacy with the children, and she has been definitely told how to apply it in her schoolroom, page by page. Every move of the ordinary teacher in the past has been timed and chalkmarked. Salaries have been fixed, raised, or lowered, and teachers have been appointed, transferred, or dropped, with precious little regard for the individual. And when there has not been actual injustice, the knowledge that it could be, and the fear that it might be done have combined to paralyze initiative and to destroy effort. This all rested upon the eternally old theory that there is one part of the race that has a monopoly of all the sense and all the conscience, to which the officials of administration belong, and another portion of the race that has neither sense nor conscience, to which the teachers belong. And so one class, as though by divine right, assumed to dominate the other.

To be sure, matters have been slowly improving. Courses of study are changing for the better, it is true, but, generally, only so far as the teachers themselves have been permitted to participate in making them. The best things in the schools today are those that have come from earnest, thoughtful, and trained teachers in actual daily contact with the children. It is unfortunate that so many of the teachers have been and still are so poorly educated and so badly trained: that is why progress is so slow.

The history of the past decade is interesting. Not long ago the rank and file of the profession were utterly unorganized. Not only were their positions insecure, their salaries were constantly subjected to such influences of a political character that it made

life a much heavier burden than the Lord originally intended it should be. There seemed to be a great shortage of funds in a city that has always been bombastic on the subject of prosperity and wealth. The men at the helm—superintendents and Board of Education—confessed themselves powerless to find a remedy, and the integrity of the school system was endangered in this city as never before.

Then there arose from the ranks an individual who, at first almost lone-handed, sought to stem the tide—a woman who, in the face of ridicule, scorn, and denunciation, set for herself and the common teachers no less a task than that of forcing those “respectable” thieves, the tax-dodgers, to turn into the public treasury the money that was justly due. This movement has no precedent and no parallel in our educational history. Attacking the skulking tax-dodger along the entire line of his defense, from the curb-stone to the Supreme Court, a decisive victory was won which brought many thousands of dollars into the school fund which the Board of Education otherwise could never have secured.

This triumph of the common school-teacher on behalf of himself and the schools possessed for him tremendous import. It marked the opening of an absolutely new era. It was the first time in their history when the teachers had appeared as a positive civic force. For the first time they had left the academic shades and won a combat in the open arena of practical life.

The moral result of this victory was much farther-reaching than the financial. It did that thing which is most dangerous to those who try to hold in leash or who seek to dominate a human being—it made the teachers think. Having once thought, and acted too, with so much effectiveness on the question of tax-dodging, it must not be supposed for an instant that they will ever again regard matters pertaining to the welfare of the schools with the same indifference that prevailed before the present steps toward organization were taken. A broader

intelligence will gradually supplant the old proverbial narrowness, and courage will take the place of cowardice.¹

The move which is now the cause of a violent discussion is the alliance of the Teachers' Federation with labor organizations, with a view to affecting legislation. This step is so new, so startling, so unprofessional in the light of anything ever done before, so generally unteacher-like in its boldness, that many people at once conclude it must be wrong, and the great majority, perhaps, have genuine doubts as to its final wisdom. Objection to the union of the two organizations is made on the ground that the labor unions represent but one part of the people, while the teachers represent all of them; that when the teachers join forces with labor, they break faith with those parents who represent capital, and thus the tendency is to widen the breach which they should try to heal.

There is some truth, as to fact, in these statements, but they do not correctly represent the principle involved. The teachers believe that certain measures proposed by the Board of Education and the superintendents are out of harmony with the spirit of democracy in education; that they represent a tendency toward bureaucracy which is not the best for a system of schools that includes all the people who stand for democracy. It places the teachers in a false light, therefore, to say they no longer represent the whole people; for, by this alliance they merely adopt what seems to them to be the most effective method of conserving the interests of the whole. Even labor-unionism does not ultimately stand as one part of the people against another, but *for the highest form of adjustment between the two parts*—labor and capital. It can be said, therefore, that in the best sense the labor unions themselves represent the true interests of the whole people. The same may be said also of

¹ Within ten years a small association of Chicago principals discussed the advisability of changing the city normal-school course from one to two years. While they privately indorsed the idea, they voted down a resolution, merely asking the board to consider the matter, on the ground that the trustees, certain ones in particular, might interpret it to be an offensive attempt at dictation! In the light of such servility, so recent, the present disposition of the common teachers to "talk back" to the board is decidedly refreshing.

capital, so far as it honestly stands for an equitable adjustment between these two great functions of society. The public at large will finally adopt those measures which seem to embody the greatest wisdom without special regard to their origin.

It is to be suspected, however, that the trustees are not less aggravated by the violation of a supposed principle than by the fact that the teachers have presumed to oppose the board's ideas as to what is best for the schools. This is the real innovation, and it will take everybody some time to get accustomed to such unusual interference. The teachers have been adjured to keep their profession pure by forswearing politics, and they observed the injunction until the politicians brought the schools to the verge of financial ruin. Then the teachers rebelled and gave the evil-doers and the weaklings an object-lesson in accordance with correct pedagogical principles, and there is not an atom of reason why this lesson should not be followed by others of like kind. There is no reason why the common teachers should not be an influential factor in settling all questions that pertain to the schools. The schools are made for the children, and the thoughtful teacher in daily touch with their lives ought to be a valuable witness in their behalf. The course of study, and all that pertains to instruction, should be developed among all of the teachers; these are not matters for either the superintendents or boards of education alone. It is also true, therefore, that their interests are involved in methods of administration. They are entirely within their rights when they, as a part of the public, consider questions relating to the appointment or election of the superintendent and board of education; when they lay out plans for self-improvement; when they seek to establish methods by which merit may be recognized and rewarded by either financial or professional advancement, or both. It is inevitable, too, that these interests should run over into civic affairs relating to the levying and collection of taxes, the establishment of salaries, tenure of office, and the granting of pensions. All right-minded people may be convinced easily of the fairness,

the wisdom, and even the necessity of the teachers taking an influential stand on these questions.

The opposition to the teachers' movement, including their alliance with the labor organization, is not based so much upon the principles involved as it is upon the fact that they either have misused or threaten to misuse their power. The real source of danger to their cause is not in the opposition of the board or superintendents, but it is within their own ranks. They enrol among their own number the ignorant, the self-seeking, and the unscrupulous. Hitherto these have been held in check by arbitrary rules of the board and by the personal authority of the superintendent. It is inevitable that this class will now seek to gain their personal ends and, sheltered within the teachers' organization, bring discredit upon the entire cause. Whether the alliance with labor unions shall work good or ill depends upon the methods they both employ to carry their points. If this step means that it merely gives to the lower elements of both organizations a wished-for opportunity to combine in controlling the machinery of the schools in the interests of their own selfishness, then the result will be evil.

But it is not a foregone conclusion that such will be the case. While the teachers do not possess all the conscience and all the sense in the community, they do have their share of both, and it is not too optimistic to believe that the wisdom of the better element will prevail. As they emerge gradually from under the direct domination of the board and superintendents, they become more and more directly responsible to the people as a whole. To ally themselves with any particular clique or faction, either civil or religious,² would be an extremely shortsighted policy, and one which the people at large will not tolerate. They do not need to resort to the tricks of the low politician to gain their ends. They have the ear of the public, and they can get by direct methods whatever

² A member of the state legislature at Springfield is reported to have said that he believed every priest in Chicago, presumably at the instance of the teachers, had written him a letter saying that if he supported certain measures favored by the Board of Education, it would mean the abrupt closing of his political career. If true, this is a bad sign.

they can actually show to be wise. After winning their fight with the tax-dodgers by a struggle in the open field, it would immensely prejudice their cause if they were at this time to adopt the tactics of the pothouse statesman. Yet it seems to be the immediate inference of many people that they have associated themselves with the labor unions that they may the more effectively do that most unwise thing.

The teachers have always been supposed to stand for character: never before in history have they had so fine an opportunity to prove it. While the people dearly love to phrase themselves in eulogies on the teacher as the censor and guardian of public morals, the utter hypocrisy of it all—the absolute distrust with which they are regarded—is clearly shown by the fact that almost everybody seems to expect them to become at once the easy prey and pliant tool of the worst elements of labor-unionism. If the public had been really sincere in its eulogies, at this time, it would have some faith, at least, in the power of the teachers to work reform in the methods of labor organizations.

The fact is, generally speaking, the teachers have not hitherto counted as a vitalizing, formative influence in community life at all. They have been caricatured in every comic print on the same page with the farmer, the ninny, and all the malaprops of society. No weakling can use suddenly acquired strength without making some false strokes. The teachers have made some blunders, doubtless, and they will likely make still others. But the move that has been made in the direction of securing political power is the first step toward a possible dignity which has heretofore only existed in name. Whether the profession will be really dignified or degraded will depend upon the character that stamps the teachers. There are certain propositions under consideration which must always have their disinterested and unqualified support. The most important are those which relate to the better training, the appointment, the promotion, and the tenure of office of the teachers themselves.

**Character the
Anchorage**

**Teachers as
Weaklings**

The teachers, however, must not befooled themselves into thinking that all of their own number are striving for regulations with an eye single to the good of the schools. They will be wise and more than fortunate if they are able to protect themselves against those who are self-seeking; who would lower standards of professional training; who would make appointments subject to political pull; who would promote on age alone, or who would allow the incompetent to sleep and rot in places made secure by personal favor, without calling for an effort toward self-improvement. That the superintendent is most earnestly striving to strengthen the profession at all of these points no one can doubt. That the best means have yet been devised not even he himself believes. But he has done work of lasting value in taking the initiative and in forcing the issues upon the teachers. He proposes to base promotion upon examinations in subjects not always closely related to the work of the teacher in the schoolroom; the test proposed by the teachers is infinitely more difficult—that it should rest upon the character of his professional work. This in time will come, and it will bring culture, too. Nobody can work at one thing and get his culture from another, for culture is always an integral part of real life. In devising the best means for promoting every aspect of their profession, the teachers now have ways open that were never offered before. It is for them to show that they know how to make the wisest use of these opportunities.

The teachers as well as the superintendents and Board of Education have a right to propose measures relating to the welfare of the schools; but it is the final wisdom of all these that must be crystallized by legislation. The professional, the administrative, and the legislative functions must be clearly recognized and defined in the school system. The professional interests devolve upon the teachers, the principals, and the superintendents; administration rests largely with the board of education, and the machinery necessary to insure the smooth working of the system, without personal, religious, or political bias, should be framed by the legislature of the state. These conditions alone will guarantee the harmony necessary to the highest efficiency of the schools. W. S. J.